4: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FN17 Ngonde FN17

439 given a slave or cow in return. Those who performed hoeing service, *milasa*, were
643 entertained with food and beer.

The ivory trade, although it bound the local rulers to the capital, involved no tribal
622 organization of elephant hunts, and scarcely touched the common people, who never
437 obtained the imported cloths exchanged for ivory, but continued to dress in bark-cloth or in their coarse home-woven cloth. Between each chief and his people economic links were determined on the one hand by his power of requisitioning food, and his greater wealth derived from the higher bride-price given for his daughters, and on the other by his people's expectation of entertainment from him in return for their food. Economic links between local chiefdoms were tenuous. Subsistence agriculture was practised by each family with the help of village neighbours and a few friends and kin; marriage with its economic exchanges was usually within the chiefdom. Of the few specialized craftsmen, representatives of each were usually found in each local group.[1]

439 Under modern economic conditions, Ngonde country is the only part of north
433 Nyasaland which cannot be called the 'Dead North', and does not suffer from excessive migration. The soil is fertile and at present there is no land shortage, though there is likelihood of one developing in the near future. Food is cultivated for export to the Lupa goldfields in Tanganyika, which is the natural market for Ngonde produce. Rice, cattle, and hides are also exported there. Parts of the lake littoral are suitable for cotton cultivation, which was revived in 1934. Ninety tons were sold in 1936. Out of the total effective male population of 12,000, 3,000 grow 'economic crops', and 7,000 grow cash crops only.[2] There are two European coffee estates in the Misuku hills, but they are handicapped by the long dry season.[3] Money is also derived from the fishing industry. An attempt to develop a ghee industry from native butter for sale to Indians in Nyasaland collapsed owing to the apathy of the Ngonde, their neglect of quality, and their insistence on too high a price for their inferior product. The main cash income of the district is derived from emigration to the Lupa goldfields, so that 90 per cent. of the money in circulation in the district is East African currency, which is accepted by the Nyasaland local government, surplus balances being remitted to the District Officer at Tukuyu, Tanganyika.[4]

Periodic Migrations

167 Long-distance labour migration is not a serious problem among the Ngonde, as they are able to earn their main cash income by working in the nearby Lupa goldfields, or by supplying that market with agricultural produce. In north Nyasa district (Ngonde), of 12,052 adult males fit to work for wages, only 11·6 per cent. are labour emigrants, and of these in 1937 only 100 were counted as 'lost ones' (i.e. not heard of since 1930).[5] In Abercorn and Kasama districts, Northern Rhodesia, where the Nyamwanga and Iwa live, 50 per cent. of the able-bodied male adult population is absent.[6]

A local migration of Nyakyusa does constitute a problem for the Tanganyika administration. Up to 1935 some 2,000 families had migrated from Rungwe district to tribal lands in the neighbouring chiefdoms of Mbeya district. By 1941 the figure had increased to 3,000. The immigrants now total 17 per cent. of the whole population

[1] Wilson, 5, 1939, pp. 39–50.
[2] Murray, 1932, p. 206.
[3] *Bell Report*, 1938, Appendix A.
[4] *Bell Report*, 1938, pp. 100–3.
[5] Smith, 1937, p. 21.
[6] Orde Browne, 1, 1938, maps.

6:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1939 FN17 Ngonde FN17

and beer; their position depended upon doing so. Up and down the hierarchy the stream of wealth travelled and this stream, in its ebb and flow, was the lifeblood of the old constitution.

(c) *THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IVORY TRADE.*

Now it was the scarce and valuable cloths derived from the ivory trade which enabled Mbande to bind the subordinate chiefs and nobles to it in secular matters. Lubaga, lacking this wealth, had no such secular power. But it is very easy to exaggerate the secular power which Mbande had. Personal loyalty to the Kyungu and the great chiefs was enforced throughout Ngonde,[1] the nobles of Ngonde participated in the selection of territorial nobles and great chiefs,[2] tribal war was organized from Mbande,[3] but that was all. In everyday life the sovereignty of the local rulers was scarcely limited. Civil war was endemic in Ngonde,[4] and secular justice had no central organization[5].

The central power of Mbande rested on the combination of divine kingship with wealth derived from the ivory-trade. But both in religious and economic matters there was a very high degree of local autonomy. We have already discussed the local autonomy in religion[6] and must now discuss it in the economic sphere.

The economic relations of men in the middle period of Ngonde's history were largely confined to the little local groups of chiefdom and fief. Subsistence agriculture was practised by each family, with the assistance of village neighbours and of a few friends and relatives who normally lived in the same chiefdom or fief. Marriage, with all the exchanges of cattle and food which marriage involved, was usually a local matter also; men only occasionally went beyond the chiefdom or the fief for their wives; while of the few specialised craftmen, such as smiths, a representative was usually to be found in each such local group. Economic links between the local groups existed: men moved from one chiefdom or fief to another leaving relatives behind, some marriages took place across the local boundaries, famous craftmen or doctors attracted clients from far afield. But these links were far fewer in number than those which obtained between the members of each separate local group.

And the ivory trade added little to the economic links between the local groups. It involved no tribal organization of elephant hunts, or anything of the kind; it touched the common people only slightly. Commoners and chiefs however did occasionally exchange tusks either

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[1] *Vide infra* 5 (a)
[2] *Vide infra* 5 (b)
[3] *Vide infra* 6 (b)
[4] *Vide infra* 6 (a)
[5] *Vide infra* 5 (c)
[6] *Vide supra* 3

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

In many areas of Eastern Africa the pressure of peasant populations on their tribal lands is a critical feature of the contemporary scene, and this is most especially so in the more fertile parts where the African has accepted the new cash economy and is beginning to appreciate the potentialities of the modern world. The situation has been highlighted recently in the public mind by the publication of the Report of the East African Royal Commission[1] which examined the economic conditions of our time and made general recommendations.

In Tanganyika the overall density of population is low (22 persons per square mile) and the general scale of economic activity still remains little above subsistence level over vast areas of Territory. There are, however, islands of extremely dense populations scattered through the country, often associated with the mountain areas, where soil is fertile, rainfall is reliable and adequate and the cultivation of crops for sale in world markets has gone ahead fairly easily. These populations still comprise peasant farming communities with little capital and their "natural" impulse is to expand their extensive agricultural system rather than to intensify their cultivation on existing holdings. Serious overcrowding soon results for the favourable areas are limited and surrounded by drier bushlands. African attitudes and legal customs concerning their land do not change quickly and they lag behind new conditions of physical limitation and economic development. Whilst the recommendations of the Royal Commission may be valuable in the establishment of general policy, it is obvious that detailed application through time demands a fairly exact knowledge and understanding of particular local conditions if it is to be reasonably successful. This is particularly the case in so large a country as Tanganyika, with its multiplicity of environments and tribal systems of law, land tenure and agriculture, and the social attitudes which encompass them.

The present essay is an attempt, sponsored by Government, to describe and analyse the land and population conditions in one small area of the Territory where a cash economy is emerging and where the pressure of a peasant population on its land resources has become acute. It is hoped that some of this account may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other similar areas both in Tanganyika and elsewhere, and that the conclusions reached may be helpful in dealing with the problems there; but primarily this is a study of one particular part of the country in order to provide the information upon which detailed policy may be founded.

The Nyakyusa are not entirely typical of many of the Bantu people of East Africa for they have a most distinctive social organisation, peculiar to themselves, based on age-villages and petty, independent chiefdoms. Also, they inhabit a country whose annual rainfall is unusually high, averaging about 100 inches. On the other hand, these people are one of the very few in Tanganyika for whom we have an excellent account of both their pre-European and early European systems of land tenure. Based on this information, obtained *before* modern changes began, we can perceive, analyse

1. *East African Royal Commission* 1953-5, *Report*: H.M.S.O. 1955. Cmd. 9475.

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people's needs. The importance of this can scarcely be overemphasised for a peasant people who are adopting a cash economy and are socially and emotionally deeply attached to their land – their single, continuous source of capital and their tribal heritage. Apart from the possibilities of labour migration which, so far at any rate, are taken up only temporarily and by the younger men, there are no economic opportunities and no capital to compete with the land. In non-economic life the land remains supreme as the persisting basis of society.

As late as 1940 the District Commissioner, Rungwe, was able to write that there was most generally sufficient land for the people's needs in all parts of the country, and the only competition was perhaps in respect of the very best and most fertile tracts, as had always been the case. G. Wilson recorded similar remarks in the late nineteen-thirties. That these observations were correct cannot be doubted. It is known, for instance, that until the post-war years in the Lake Plains – where now land shortage is most acute – there was a broad belt of mainly unoccupied, uncultivated bushland, infested with game, extending from the Livingstone Mountains in the east to the Nyasaland border in the south-west. There were extensive, more or less empty areas in almost every chiefdom. The people were subsistence farmers only, and also banana eaters, and in this well-watered country their agricultural requirements were adequately met on very modest holdings, from most of which two harvests a year could be gathered.

In the brief period of little more than ten years the situation has altered radically to the point of a general shortage of land (except for some parts in the north-west), and especially in the Lake Plains the available land is quite insufficient to meet the demands of the inhabitants. This critical change is the result partly of an increasing population, augmented by some immigration from other tribal areas; but more especially it is the result of the demands for larger arable holdings to meet cash crop aspirations – i.e., money earning. Although both coffee and paddy rice cultivation had begun before 1939, and both were encouraged and developed during the War years, it was not until after 1945 that both of these cash crops became well and generally established and the demand for money incomes became universal.

III

It was in order to investigate this new situation, which was beginning to become serious and to cause concern to Government, that I made a sociological survey in 1955. I had already spent some months in the country in 1954 investigating labour migration in order to provide Government with information and to make recommendations to deal with the problems arising. The second period of work occupied about five months. During both enquiries I was extremely fortunate in having the use of the excellent monographs of G. and M. Wilson who had carried out a conventional anthropological study of the Nyakyusa between 1934 and 1938. Without their basic work behind me, neither of my two studies would have been possible in so brief a time, and I must gratefully acknowledge the real value of their writings.

The intention had been that a complete enquiry should be made into Nyakyusa land conditions in all parts of the country, and that it should culminate in a full recording of tribal land law and custom with a view to its possible reform. In the event only the initial enquiry in the field in the Lake Plains was completed and the results of that alone are described in this essay. Whereas in former days there were probably few distinctive differences between the various parts of the country, in modern times with the introduction of different cash crops, with differential population growths and varying demands on the land, important divergences seem to be arising. For example,

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161 If therefore, pending the next Census to be made in 1957, we assume these rates of increase, then by 1955 it may be estimated that the Nyakyusa numbered about 217,000 at an average density of 233 persons per square mile, allowing 13.7 acres of land per family of five. For the Lake Plains alone, the population in 1955 would have been nearly 60,000 at an average density of 287 persons per square mile, with 11.2 acres per family. If we also include the estimated number of absentee migrant labourers in the base year of 1948, then there were in 1955 perhaps 63,000 people dependent on the land resources of the Lake Plains at an average density of 303 per square mile, though in fact some 6,000 men were temporarily absent from home in that year.

The figures and estimates are given in Table I. These averages do, of course, hide some considerable and significant local variations which are further described at pages 14 ff. below.

TABLE I
NYAKYUSA POPULATION

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	1948 *Census*			1955 *Estimates*		
	a	*b*	*c*	*a*	*b*	*c*
Lake Plains at increase of 1% p.a.	55,700	268	11.9	59,700	287	11.2
Central Region at increase of 1½% p.a.	48,500	224	14.2	53,800	248	12.9
N.E. Highlands at increase of 1½% p.a.	40,300	183	17.4	44,700	203	15.8
N.W. Highlands at increase of 1½% p.a.	53,200	185	17.3	59,000	205	15.6
NYAKYUSA in tribal area	197,700	212	15.2	217,200	233	13.7

a = population
b = persons per square mile on land available for African use.
c = average acreage available per family of 5 persons.

Assuming that there were in 1948 about 3,000 men temporarily absent from their homes in the Lake Plains but who remained dependent on the land resources of that region, then the following estimate may be made:–

Lake Plains – persons resident at home and temporarily abroad:–

a	*b*	*c*	*a*	*b*	*c*
58,700	282	11.3	62,935	303	10.6

The approximate areas available for African use in the tribal lands (excluding alienated land, forest reserves and main roads) are:–

Lake Plains – 208 sq. miles — N.E. Highlands – 220 sq. miles
Central Region – 217 sq. miles — N.W. Highlands – 288 sq. miles
BuNyakyusa – 933 sq. miles

In these calculations no account is taken of unusable land such as swamps, steep slopes, thicket, etc.

Cash Cropping: Paddy Cultivation

433 432 This condition of a high density of population exists in a modern economy in which cash-cropping is universally accepted and desired. Under the former subsistence agriculture, because of heavy rainfall and natural annual flooding, quite small-sized holdings were adequate to satisfy a family's food requirements. Two harvests a year are easily obtained in some 241 combination of maize, beans, groundnuts and finger millet, with a few small "luxury" crops; and the banana groves yield continuously. The Nyakyusa were and are extremely fortunate in their food supply, and seldom experience shortages such as occasionally or even commonly afflict many peoples of East Africa.

243 [144] Rice was first introduced in 1896 by two chiefs who obtained the seed from Nyasaland Arabs; and in 1898 the Moravian Mission and a Swahili

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trader brought in other seed. The trader himself planted a large plot and his success seems to have stimulated the Nyakyusa to follow suit. There was a slow but gradual development of planting and by 1932 it was estimated that some 500 tons of hand-hulled rice were sold. It had become clear that the alluvial flood plains around the northern tip of Lake Nyasa were ideally suited to paddy growing. Until 1942 the people continued to hand-hull their crop and sell the rice, but in that year they were persuaded to sell the paddy direct to a locally established mill. Following initial difficulties in milling, handling and marketing, the Government built a store capable of holding 14,000 bags and it also took over the whole of the marketing with a seconded District Officer in charge. In 1947 the cultivators formed their first co-operative society. This movement has been encouraged by Government and the local Co-operative Union now deals with storage and marketing with the guidance of a Government Co-operative Officer.

The figures of sales of rice and paddy are given in Table II.[1]

Paddy has become a well-established crop, not only as the single cash crop of the region, but also as a food crop second only (or even equal) to the traditionally staple banana. About four-fifths of all arable holdings are paddy fields – though parts of these are used for dry season crops of maize, beans, etc. Virtually every Nyakyusa land-holder now grows paddy, and the vast majority regard it as their main crop. Cultivation is mainly by ox-plough followed by broadcast sowing and hand-weeding. Government efforts to encourage nurseries and planting out in rows have so far been entirely unsuccessful. Yields and perhaps quality too are thought to be lower than need be; the chief factor in production seems to be the degree of natural flooding during the wet season.

TABLE II

SALES OF RICE AND PADDY, 1932-56*

		tons			*tons*
1932	..	500	1945	..	1,200
1933	..	600	1946	..	2,700
1934	..	600	1947	..	3,300
1935	..	600	1948	..	2,100
1936	..	700	1949	..	3,700
1938	..	700	1950	..	2,300
1939	..	1,200	1951	..	1,200
1940	..	1,500	1952	..	2,000
1941	..	1,600	1953	..	5,700
1942	..	2,200	1954	..	5,900
1943	..	2,800	1955	..	5,700
1944	..	2,900	1956	..	3,000

*1932-41—hand-hulled rice, estimates only.
1942-47—paddy, sold through Government agency.
1948-56—paddy, sold through cultivators' co-operatives.

The cultivation of paddy requires relatively large-sized holdings due to the nature of the crop and the local extensive method of agriculture – for example, to produce a given income requires a far larger area of paddy in the Lake Plains than of coffee in the Northern Highlands of Nyakyusa country. As paddy cultivation became established, men increased their arable holdings in order to earn their money incomes. Larger holdings, rather than improved agricultural techniques, have become directly connected with higher incomes, and so the demand for more land set in. Assisted by the now general use of ploughs, paddy growing increased rapidly wherever it was found ecologically possible – i.e., within the alluvial flood plains and the coterminous area of annual natural flooding. Before this new demand for land emerged there were, even in the most highly populated parts, extensive areas which were more or

1. Information has been supplied by the Co-operative Officer, Tukuyu.

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number of separate plots per holding was less than where land was scarcer; at the same time the average size of separate plots was smaller in those more land-hungry villages. The reader may refer to Table III (page 15) for some illustrative figures. Though differences are not yet very great, nevertheless there seems to be a fairly clear correlation between the average size of villagers' holdings on the one hand, and on the other the number and size of separate plots, and this is entirely borne out by my general information obtained in villages where actual measurements were not made. The inescapable conclusion must be that increasing scarcity of land in the Lake Plains leads to increasing fragmentation and dispersion of holdings; further, the present land situation and land tenure system can only lead to a continuation of this trend.

To emphasise the actual situation in 1955, let me reiterate the results of my own village surveys in the very high density region. In a village in Koroso's chiefdom only a quarter of the younger men had paddy land of their own, holdings averaging about three-quarters of an acre; in a village in Mwakipesile's chiefdom, only 17 per cent. of the younger men had paddy land and holdings averaged about half an acre (cf. Table VII, page 37). These two examples are taken from the areas of most severe land shortage and are not therefore altogether typical of the whole Lake Plains. Nevertheless, I do not think that they are entirely atypical; more importantly, they indicate the present trend. Within another generation this fragmentation and scatter of holdings may well be the common feature everywhere in the flood plains unless the system of tenure and inheritance is modified. If the increase in population is quickened through improved medical facilities, better diet and housing, and improved conditions generally, then the position will become more acute. Such an increase is only to be expected. The Nyakyusa have decisively entered a money economy and they have learnt to seek higher standards of living. Only from their fields, by cash-cropping, can they expect to earn their livings and the demand for better living will not be curtailed – nor, of course, is it desirable that it should be.

There is another aspect of this whole matter which must be considered. It relates to the movement of individuals between villages. Such movement was, in earlier European days, a crucial factor in the age-village structure, for it was not only exceedingly frequent, but also it tended to undermine the idealised coeval basis of village life. Movement between villages is increasingly difficult now, for a newcomer naturally cannot easily obtain land, nor as much land as he would desire even at a moderate demand. Nevertheless, the reasons for movement persist, and they will do so whilst the fear of witchcraft remains and whilst illness and misfortune are attributable to the unfavourable aura of a place. There remains also the tradition of moving so that a man may escape from bad relations with kinsfolk or neighbours, or from the obloquy resulting from his own disapproved actions. Much social and psychological tension is being created now as a result of the new difficulty of movement, and so far the Nyakyusa have not evolved alternative methods.

On the other hand, so deeply engrained is the notion of the prestige and power which accrues to a village by virtue of the number of its inhabitants, that headmen and villagers alike remain most reluctant to refuse to accept newcomers, even when it inevitably means that the present inhabitants must meet a further decrease in the average amount of land available per family, for a newcomer must be allocated a holding if he is to remain. Consequently, if a holding is for any reason left vacant, a headman tends to refuse to re-allocate some or all of it amongst his villagers and thus to augment their holdings; but instead he keeps it in reserve pending the hoped-for arrival of another newcomer. Men desiring to leave their own village try to get

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land en bloc. Young men compete with one another, with their elder brothers and with their fathers for allocations of land left vacant. We also saw, however, that often in the larger families[1] not all the sons are able to get a share of the paternal holding, or at least not a share of practicable size. Thus younger sons are forced to resort to trying to obtain vacant land elsewhere – possibly within the same village, but as often as not outside. Finally, the young man on his new holding may find his neighbours to be of any age; certainly they will not have been members of his own original coeval hamlet.

The way for this changing concept of village life and the new sort of village was prepared in the years before land shortage became important. The changed political system has been briefly noted already, but no less important was the great increase in inter-village movement in earlier European days when peace and personal security had been established. During this period Wilson (1938, page 32) reckoned that perhaps 80 per cent. of Nyakyusa shifted at least once from the place where they first obtained fields. This estimate, whilst perhaps holding good for Highland Nyakyusa amongst whom Wilson mainly worked, was too high for the people of the Lake Plains, where about 40 per cent. is more correct according to my genealogical and village surveys. That is still a relatively high degree of mobility for a mainly subsistence, peasant society such as it was in those years. It is clear that the pseudo-fraternal bond of coevality could not persist as a main element of village life and consciousness, when in fact as many as half of the members of a village were not original coeval founders but had come in from elsewhere. Before the land shortage, movement did not entail the shifting of young men to other young men's villages, or of older men to other older men's villages. It was, at least eventually, promiscuous movement, ignoring age categories. The compulsions of land shortage seem, in retrospect, only to have followed existing lines of village development and to have begun the completion of the process.

In the Lake Plains, therefore, the village persists as a close, territorial, land-owning group and as a specific cluster of homesteads and huts, usually with a village street, the whole closely hemmed in by continuous banana groves. Beyond this lie the arable lands, usually food-crop fields nearby and paddy fields farther off. In jealously protecting what it already holds, the village has gained a new exclusiveness, for the security of the individual land-holder is maintained by the corporate ownership of the village and by excluding outsiders as far as possible. On the other hand, it is no longer an age-village either in fact or intention, and it cannot be, for age-villages were consistent only with an expanding territorial system and a subsistence economy.

This brief analysis of Nyakyusa village organisation in recent times applies only to the Lake Plains. In some parts of both the Central Region and the Northern Highlands the age-basis of Nyakyusa villages had most probably already been seriously weakened in pre-European times.[2] On the other hand, elsewhere, and particularly in the more conservative parts less affected by modern trends and the cash economy, the traditional age-village still exists in something like its old form.

Land shortage has appeared in the Highlands together with a developing cash economy, but the basis of agricultural and economic change lies mainly in coffee cultivation which, of course, requires relatively smaller fields than does paddy in the Lake Plains, but it needs more care and attention from the grower for moderate success. As far as I could see in the course of

1. Polygny is still the norm amongst the older and many middle-aged men, and therefore a father often leaves several sons to inherit.
2. According to elderly informants in Western Kukwa, Mwakaleli and some central chiefdoms, and also the evidence of old village sites.

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my earlier labour migration enquiries in the Highlands, the village as a close residential unit is breaking up as the people are increasingly adopting the more common East African pattern of each family building its own homestead in its own land-holding. These northern Nyakyusa say that they must have their coffee plots next to their homesteads for the sake of continuous supervision, and that this is impossible (which is true enough) where men live close together in compact villages. Again, coffee plots, with their standing, permanent trees, have become a valuable item of inheritance; sons lose no opportunity of taking them irrespective of the locations of their coevals or of the identity of their immediate neighbours. The values of land, cash-crops and material progress are placed much higher than the traditional values of coevality; indeed, such traditional values are largely inconsistent with modern wants and aspirations.

Thus the Nyakyusa age-village has become almost obsolete and it would seem that it must inevitably vanish altogether even in the remaining conservative areas (e.g., in the east). Furthermore, its disappearance is leading to a distinct divergence between the Lake Plains Nyakyusa and those of the Highlands. How far this divergence will become permanent and basically significant cannot be foreseen as yet in this early stage. Clearly the compact village is best fitted to an arable economy of rice cultivation in the Lake Plains, and at least until there is further agricultural change it will persist as a most important social group.

Nevertheless, with its enhanced exclusiveness and relative social isolation and with renewed rivalry with its neighbours, the Lake Plains village is scarcely conducive to the encouragement of agricultural and economic development. Neither is it anything but harmful towards contemporary efforts in the politico-administrative sphere to reduce parochialism and to foster a sense of unity and co-operation beyond the village and the petty traditional chiefdoms. Whilst supervisory control of the land through the headman is in general excellent, reasonable and readily understandable to the people, yet the excess of restrictiveness, the competitive scrambling for vacated holdings and the jealous fears are surely more than merely unfortunate. There needs to be some modification to loosen the over-tight strings of village corporate ownership, to regularise the transfer of vacated holdings and to lessen the fears of village against village. These points are taken up again in Chapter V.

Cattle and Pastoral Requirements

Unfortunately, no great accuracy can be presumed for the Rungwe District cattle censuses, but the available figures are summarised in Table VI.

TABLE VI
NYAKYUSA CATTLE

	1955				1951	
	No. of cattle	*Acres per beast*	*Cattle per person*	*Cattle per family of 5*	*No. of cattle*	*Acres per beast*
Lake Plains	31,418	4.1	0.5	2.5	26,822	5.2
Central Region ..	19,380	7.1	0.4	2	19,160	7.2
N.E. Highlands ..	19,095	7.4	0.4	2	17,165	8.4
N.W. Highlands ..	22,974	8.0	0.4	2	16,855	10.9
Total:						
Nyakyusa.. ..	92,867	6.4	0.4	2	80,002	7.2

The indicated increase in the numbers of cattle may well be attributable only to improved census enumeration by the Veterinary Department.

Although 6.4 acres per head of cattle for all Nyakyusa country, and even 4.1 acres in the Lake Plains, might seem to be adequate in a country so

[498 423 [643] do this is however, seriously to strain the facts and values beyond what the average Nyakusa would understand or allow. The chief does not, as we have seen, allocate land either to villages as individual units or to the villagers separately; new, traditional villages obtained their land by allocation from the old headmen, and individual villagers were and are allocated their holdings by their own headman. The chief can act as arbitrator between villagers and villages, but his decisions have been notoriously difficult to enforce. Undoubtedly commoners resent the attempts by their chief to interfere in their own village affairs.

[433] Now it may, of course, be desirable to widen and thus facilitate the scope of land authority, allocatory responsibility and equitable supervision, especially in the interests of a developing cash economy in a situation of a critical shortage of land. But if this significant change in native land law is to be introduced, it should surely be as a result of a proper appreciation of the facts and the existing law, and it must be in conformity with the interests and desires of the people themselves. It ought not to be a gradual sliding into a new situation as a result of other factors – as a by-product of local government development, for example, or as a matter of administrative convenience unsupported by real understanding. To make the chiefs the executive agents of the local government system does not necessarily mean – or it should not – that they should be passively allowed to usurp the land allocation powers of their headmen. Further, in view of modern Territorial policy aimed at bringing the people and their village leaders into the local government system, it seems perhaps unwise that at the same time chiefs should be allowed to assert non-traditional, autocratic land powers which are resented by villagers and headmen, and which may do little to improve the already difficult situation. When the additional powers of the chiefs are used at least partly, if not mainly, for self-aggrandizement or for personal profit, then it is a trend which needs to be strictly curtailed and controlled.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Briefly to summarise the contemporary land situation: in the Lake Plains it may be said that in the main the traditional land tenure system and land law still continue as the basis of native land holding today. The essential feature in recent years has been the acute land shortage in relation to arable needs under the current system of agriculture. Village unity and village exclusiveness have been increased and so also has the authority of the village headman in his control and allocation of land rights. Security of tenure has been strengthened, if anything, and one of the most important methods of obtaining land is now by inheritance. The new law establishing inheritance from father to sons, whilst generally acceptable to the people, is producing a number of civil suits which form the greatest proportion of the more important land cases before the local courts.

The shortage of land is principally the result of increased demands for paddy (i.e. cash crop) cultivation, although the population appears to be increasing slowly. In the high density regions almost all men have considerably less land than they could cultivate, especially under the impetus of the ox-plough, with the developing desires for money income. In the low density region of the low foothills there is still some vacant or partly utilised land, though of very inferior quality for paddy cultivation. The shortage hits the younger men severely, and many of them cannot obtain land at all until the death or senility of their fathers. Fragmentation and dispersion of holdings is rapidly becoming serious and without check.

The first question which arises is whether anything can be done to ease the pressure of population on the country by making more land available, or by making its distribution more equitable.

The thinly populated parts of the northern region of the Lake Plains offer a meagre solution only, for the country is raised above the level of the flood plains and is often broken and hilly. Fertility is low, erosion is a constant danger and the paddy yield (if obtainable at all) is poor. Nyakyusa from the densely populated areas to south and east are therefore most unwilling to move there. In any case the available land, which remains safely and economically open to cultivation, is filling up fairly quickly – mainly by immigration. Certainly I do not think that it can supply sufficient space to meet modern needs. There is, however, no reason why immigrants should make a difficult situation worse, and therefore it is suggested that further immigration from outside the Lake Plains should be carefully controlled if not altogether prevented. Indubitably outsiders (almost entirely Nyakyusa from the Highlands) who hold land without permanent residence should be prohibited and their holdings reallocated to local inhabitants.

As I have already indicated (page 17), I do not think that the problem of men who hold unusually large acreages is particularly serious. Such large holdings are relatively few and will be inevitably split up by inheritance on the deaths of the present occupiers.

In the flood plains proper there is, as far as I am aware, extremely little new land which could be brought under cultivation. Mechanical assistance in the clearance of dense reed thicket[1] and in drainage schemes would produce

1. These areas of thicket are heavily inundated in the wet season but, if cleared, could be used for a dry season crop.